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CUBA: FOCUS ON PUERTO RICO

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Intelligence Memorandum

Cuba: Focus on Puerto Rico

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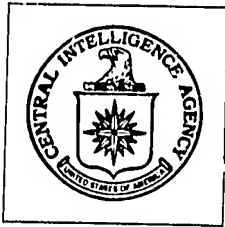
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September 5, 1975

Cuba: Focus on Puerto Rico

Summary

The Castro regime is currently engaged in a major propaganda campaign to trumpet the cause of Puerto Rican independence. One of the drive's high points will be the so-called International Conference of Solidarity with Puerto Rican Independence, to be held in Havana from September 5 to 7. The Moscow-backed World Peace Council will be the ostensible host, but Cuba has provided the impetus behind the scenes.

The campaign, a direct and open affront to the US, has been thrust forward at the same time the Castro regime has been surfacing broad hints that it would view favorably any gestures aimed at improving relations with the US. Unless the Cubans are deliberately manufacturing a bargaining chip for eventual negotiations with the US, the Puerto Rico drive would appear to run counter to Havana's pursuit of detente with Washington. Moreover, the drive appears to conflict directly with another facet of Cuban foreign policy; it is taking place at the very time Havana's efforts to "export the revolution" in this hemisphere have reached their lowest point in 16 years.

Upon closer scrutiny, however, the campaign complements rather than conflicts with current Cuban foreign policy. Aware of the impact a Cuban reconciliation with the US would have on the Third World countries and also on Cuba's standing among world revolutionary movements, Havana needed a device to offset the sense of betrayal that movement toward a reconciliation with the "imperialist" US would engender. The Puerto Rico issue lends itself particularly well to international forums such as the UN, where Cuba can beat the drums before a receptive audience of Third World representatives and thus certify its revolutionary and "anti-imperialist" credentials.

The Puerto Rico issue is being pressed as vigorously at home as abroad. This indicates that Havana's intentions extend beyond the creation of a bargaining point for negotiations; Castro would hardly focus domestic attention on an issue on which he eventually intended to compromise. It also suggests that Castro believes he has to bolster his own image at home as he sheds his independent policies and hews ever closer to the Soviet line. It is significant that the Puerto Rico campaign is being pressed primarily by those Cubans—the "old," or pre-Castro, communists—who have

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the closest links to Moscow rather than by Castro's own ex-guerrilla comrades; waging the campaign may have been part of the price extracted from the "old" communists in return for the guerrillas' support of detente.

In addition, the campaign is Castro's signal that detente is not synonymous with amity. No matter how successful he may be in bringing about a reconciliation with the US, he has no intention of exposing his people to the "corrupting" influence of US culture introduced through movies, books, newspapers, magazines, and tourists. He is convinced that not just Cuba, but all of Latin America, can gain more from association with the US if that association is governed by confrontation rather than cooperation. Puerto Rican independence is an issue that has significant appeal in Latin America, enough at least to earn Cuba kudos for flicking the eagle's feathers, and yet it is a safe one that will cost Havana little as long as it stops short of paramilitary involvement. Furthermore, Castro may believe that within Puerto Rico itself there is enough sentiment for independence to hope that in the long term the island will indeed split off from the US, thereby justifying Cuba's support and placing Havana in a privileged position to influence the new government.

Cuba's efforts on behalf of Puerto Rican independence, therefore, are likely to continue in high gear for some time. To gain temporary advantage, Castro may choose to soften the campaign from time to time as circumstances—such as negotiations with Washington—warrant, but he is not likely to abandon one of the few causes left that he apparently views as shoring up his revolutionary facade without seriously interfering with his pursuit of detente. It also serves as a brake on those at home whose expectations of a return to normalcy in Cuban-US relations might be aroused.

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The Declining Revolutionary Image

Havana is waging the Puerto Rican campaign primarily to offset the loss of prestige the Castro regime has suffered among revolutionaries and leaders of the Third World and to minimize the negative impact on these leaders of Cuba's efforts to effect a reconciliation with the US. Leaders of the Non-aligned Movement, meeting in Algiers in September 1973, witnessed a performance by Fidel Castro himself that left many questioning Cuba's right to membership in the movement. In his address to the conference on September 7, Castro argued so strongly on Moscow's behalf that Libya's Qadhafi walked out of the meeting hall and Cambodia's Sihanouk interrupted so vehemently that the conference chairman, Algeria's Boumedienne, had to intervene to restore order. Although Castro hurriedly broke relations with Israel in a belated effort to recoup lost prestige, and a public show of reconciliation with Qadhafi was manufactured as a face-saving gesture at the conference's end, Fidel had seriously compromised himself and his revolution before a host of chiefs of state of nonaligned countries.

Some ground has undoubtedly since been regained as a result of the technical assistance Havana has given to various underdeveloped nations, particularly those in Africa. Upwards of 2,000 Cubans are serving Third World governments in fields ranging from medicine and education to construction and military support. But friction again surfaced at the meeting of the Nonaligned Movement's Coordinating Bureau in Havana in March 1975. On delivering the opening address welcoming the delegates, Cuban Foreign Minister Raul Roa criticized the oil-producing members for failing to use their windfall profits to the advantage of their less fortunate neighbors. In closing the conference, Fidel reiterated Roa's complaint, suggesting that little had been done in the intervening three days to solve the problem.

Cuba's problems with the Nonaligned Movement were a repetition of the problems Havana had been experiencing with revolutionary movements, particularly those in Latin America, as the Castro regime gradually withdrew from militant advocacy of violent revolution in the wake of Che Guevara's dramatic adventure in Bolivia in 1967. Some guerrilla leaders such as Douglas Bravo in Venezuela openly accused Havana of betrayal as Cuban material support of guerrilla groups dwindled. Others, however, continued to look to Havana for leadership and support, willing to base their faith on little more than revolutionary rhetoric, and this permitted the Castro regime to maintain a modicum of revolutionary bona fides.

Havana's complete conversion to Moscow's via pacifica finally occurred late last year.

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Cuba's adherence to the new line was publicly cast in concrete at the meeting of Latin American and Caribbean communist parties in Havana in early June 1975. The Castro regime privately agreed to terminate its ties with revolutionary groups that refused to subordinate themselves to the local communists, and the Cuban Communist Party was one of the 24 signatories to the published conference declaration that acknowledged the supremacy of the local communist parties in the revolutionary struggles in their respective countries. Revolutionaries who formerly filled themselves at the Cuban trough began looking elsewhere for aid, and as the full impact of the June meeting became apparent, the Castro regime again came under fire for betraying its revolutionary ideals.

The Age of Detente

The Soviet pressure that had caused Cuba to suffer a loss of respect both in the Third World and among rebel leaders was also responsible for the Castro regime's interest in an improvement in relations with the US. This change dates from the time of Leonid Brezhnev's visit to Cuba in January and February 1974, but Havana's expectations regarding the possibility of a reconciliation were not whetted significantly until midyear, when events in Washington pointed to an imminent change in the presidency.

At about the same time, the tempo of Cuba's propaganda on Puerto Rican independence—long an important feature of Havana's anti-US diatribes—began to quicken. Publicity was given to Juan Mari Bras' proposal, made at the meeting of the World Peace Council in Paris in May, for an international conference of solidarity with Puerto Rican independence in the first quarter of 1975. Mari Bras had co-founded the Puerto Rican Pro-Independence Movement in 1959, and when that organization changed its name to the Puerto Rican Socialist Party in 1971, he became its secretary general. Although the party maintains a permanent office in Havana for liaison with the Cuban government, Mari Bras visited Havana in June 1974 presumably to take a personal hand in discussing and coordinating plans for the proposed meeting.

While in Havana, Mari Bras, accompanied by his deputy, Fermin Arraiza, and by Carlos Rivera, the party's permanent representative in Cuba, attended a meeting at the Cuban Institute for Friendship Among Peoples on June 24 at which the Cuban Committee for Solidarity with Puerto Rican Political Prisoners was constituted. The Puerto Rican trio also met with Fidel Castro, Foreign Minister Raul Roa, top Latin America policy official Manuel Pineiro, and Political Bureau member Juan Almeida, for "an extensive exchange of opinions on a tightening of the links of solidarity between the Cuban Communist Party and the Puerto Rican Socialist Party."

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Later, Manuel Gonzalez, member of the Political Commission of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, visited Cuba while Cuban media focused attention on the plight of five Puerto Ricans jailed in the US for an attempt on the life of President Truman in 1950 and for an armed attack on Congress in 1954. Close cooperation was established between Prensa Latina, the Cuban government's press service, and *Claridad*, official organ of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party; on November 30, *Claridad* began publishing on a daily basis with a circulation, according to the Cubans, of 20,000 copies on weekdays and 40,000 on Sundays.

In early 1975, the Cuban campaign gained momentum as demands for the prisoners' release were reiterated, and preparations got under way for the solidarity conference. To place the issue formally before an international audience, Cuba arranged for a delegation of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party to participate as observer in the Third Coordination Conference of the Nonaligned Coordinating Bureau held in Cuba last March. Then, after an initial rebuff, the Cubans finally gained the grudging agreement of the Soviet-backed World Peace Council to act as the ostensible sponsor of the coming conference. By this time, there had been clear signs that Havana was hoping for some gesture from Washington that would get the ball rolling toward bilateral negotiations.

The Preparatory Meeting

On March 30 and 31, a preparatory meeting was held at Santa Maria del Mar, just outside Havana, with "representatives of 28 countries and 12 international organizations" in attendance. Although the ostensible purpose of the meeting was to set the stage for the September conference, it appears that the "representatives" did little more than rubber stamp a program drawn up in advance by the Cubans. A conference preparatory committee was established, and Dr. Juan Marinello, member of the Cuban Communist Party Central Committee and for more than two decades president of the pre-Castro communist party, was "unanimously" elected the committee's president. As president of Cuba's Movement for Peace and Sovereignty of Peoples, he had been in charge of organizing and promoting the preparatory meeting.

Puerto Rico was represented at the preparatory meeting by a delegation headed by Fermin Arraiza, deputy secretary general of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party. Other members were party president Julio Vives Vasquez; party foreign affairs secretary Pedro Baiges; Rafael Anglada and Alberto Marques, both members of the party's Political Commission; and two officials of the Puerto Rican Peace Council including the council's president,

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Noel Colon Martinez. The council had been reorganized in June 1974 to provide a broad front for all organizations, including the Socialist Party and the Independence Party, committed to a complete break between Puerto Rico and the US. Colon Martinez, who presides over the council's executive committee, gives the front a measure of prominence; he was the Independence Party's candidate for governor in the Puerto Rican elections in 1972.

Cuba's ties to the Puerto Rican Socialist Party are so close as to cause embarrassment on occasion. When representatives of 24 communist parties of Latin America and the Caribbean met in Havana in June to issue a declaration of principles for the "anti-imperialist struggle" in Latin America, Puerto Rico was represented by the local communist party, not the socialists. Havana had reportedly made a strong bid to invite the Socialist Party, first as the sole representative of Puerto Rico and later at least as an observer, but Moscow and the US communists prevailed upon the Castro regime to exclude the socialists from any form of participation. The Cubans, however, clearly still look upon the socialists as the true standard bearers of the independence movement and the most plausible recipients of Cuban support.

Spreading the Word

Once the preparatory committee had been formed and propaganda commitments had been extracted from the various international organizations participating in the meeting, Havana increased its own unilateral efforts to manufacture support for the September conference. Pre-Castro communist Clementina Serra Robledo, Cuban Communist Party Central Committee member and vice president of Marinello's Cuban Movement for Peace and Sovereignty of Peoples, delivered a special address promoting the Puerto Rican conference to 51 leaders of youth and student organizations from "over 16 Central American and Caribbean countries" attending a "seminar on the Cuban Revolution" in Havana in the latter half of June.

On July 14, the Cuban Committee was formed at the Cuban Institute for Friendship Among Peoples in Havana as the domestic sponsor of the September conference. Dr. Jose Antonio Portuondo, director of the Institute of Literature and Linguistics of the Cuban Academy of Sciences, was appointed the Committee's president. Clementina Serra Robledo, second secretary of the Cuban Central Labor Organization Agapito Figueroa, and Alicia Alonso, Cuba's famed ballerina, were named vice presidents. Like Serra Robledo, Portuondo and Figueroa were members of the pre-Castro communist party, and Alicia Alonso had long and close contact with it. The Committee also included representatives from Cuba's mass organizations, who presumably were to coordinate propaganda activities on the domestic scene.

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For visual support in Havana's campaign, the Cuban Institute of Motion Picture Art and Industry concocted a special film entitled "Puerto Rico." It purports to portray the role of the US in Puerto Rico and was so well received by Fidel Castro that sound tracks in 20 languages were commissioned so the film could achieve universal exposure. In addition, a three-part series of programs entitled "Viva Puerto Rico Libre" was presented in June on Cuba's main national television network.

To carry the word abroad in person, representatives spent much of July and August touring Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean. During these trips, local groups were organized in several countries to carry out propaganda activities on cue from Havana on behalf of Puerto Rican independence.

In Cuba, the period from August 28 to September 3 had been designated the "week of solidarity with Puerto Rican independence." The week was highlighted by meetings and demonstrations organized throughout the island by the mass organizations, and displays and other propaganda activities were conducted at work centers and peasant bases. As for the conference itself, the Cubans are expecting representatives from 120 countries and many international organizations to be on hand for the opening session on September 5.

"Old" Communists in the Forefront

"Old" communists, as members of the pre-Castro communist party are commonly called, have filled virtually all the key positions of high visibility in Havana's Puerto Rican campaign; the largest faction of the regime's top level—the guerrilla elite—has had no identifiable role at all. Yet it is the "old" communists who have also been the most active in pressing the Soviets' policy of detente on Castro. It hardly seems logical that the leadership faction that has worked so diligently for an improvement in Cuba's relations with the US would at the same time be agitating vigorously on an issue that promised to worsen those relations. Moreover, the reported reluctance of the World Peace Council—reluctance that presumably was Moscow-inspired since the council is a Moscow front—to serve as the sponsor for a major milestone in the Puerto Rican campaign suggests that the "old" communists have been contravening Moscow's will and endangering the detente process—actions remarkably out of place for the faction that has long been Moscow's most dutiful servant in Cuba.

This apparent paradox most likely stems from Castro's own ambivalence toward detente. He is doubtless wary of the impact that a reconciliation with the US would have and has decided to use the Puerto Rican independence issue as a signal to both domestic and foreign audiences that despite

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detente he has not "gone soft" on imperialism. He may have hoped that, by assigning the burden of the Puerto Rican campaign to the very group that urged him to improve ties with the US, he could defuse any such charges and lay to rest any suspicions that he had lost control over a minority faction of his regime. In fact, he may have extracted a commitment from the "old" communists to press the Puerto Rico issue in return for his own acceptance of detente—a policy to which some of the guerrilla elite have apparently given only grudging support.

For their part, the "old" communists have shouldered the burden in such a fashion that their two most important figures, Deputy Prime Minister Carlos Rafael Rodriguez and party Secretariat member Blas Roca, remain uncompromised. The "old" communists, involved in the campaign all hold important government positions, but the scope of their responsibilities is far narrower than that of Rodriguez or Roca and their influence is thus correspondingly less.

Outlook

Except for continued activity at the UN, where Cuban ambassador Alarcon can be expected to keep the issue alive and possibly to press for observer status for pro-independence spokesmen, Havana's Puerto Rico campaign may taper off temporarily following the September conference. Promotional plans drafted at the meeting will probably take some time to implement, and in the interim the volume of propaganda is likely to slacken. Energies in Havana will be redirected for at least two or three months as preparations get under way in earnest for the Cuban Communist Party's first party congress in December. It is doubtful, however, that Puerto Rico as a "burning issue" will be neglected for long by the Castro regime. It is too convenient a political tool to be cast aside just because the initial glamor has begun to fade, especially when Havana is in need of a cause with which to burnish its revolutionary, anti-imperialist image. As an editorial in the Cuban Communist Party daily newspaper stated in April, "for special, deep-seated reasons, the cause of Puerto Rican freedom is an inescapable revolutionary obligation for Cuba."

Moreover, Cuba is too deeply committed to maintaining a confrontation with the US—no matter what the outcome of reconciliation efforts—to let the matter drop entirely. The campaign may be eased to accommodate negotiating strategy after talks get under way, but Cuba appears to have embarked on a long-term effort to plead the cause of Puerto Rican independence and most likely will not be easily dissuaded from it. Cuban propaganda, of course, can be turned on or off at a word from Castro, but it appears that he has invested so much in the campaign and has pressed the

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issue so hard in both the international and domestic arenas that dropping it would cause him serious embarrassment and would confirm in the eyes of many observers abroad the Cuban "betrayal" of revolutionaries the world over. It could also compromise Castro at home with those whose "internationalist" commitment will appear to have been undercut.

Furthermore, the concentration on Puerto Rico appears to be an integral part of Cuba's revised Latin American policy. As a result of a Central Committee decision last fall, Havana will direct its energies primarily toward political entities in or bordering on the Caribbean basin, instead of diffusing its efforts and political resources in an attempt to give equal priority to all of Latin America. Havana seems to be convinced that conditions in Puerto Rico are so promising as to justify strong support for the campaign. Unless the socialists and "independentistas" are repudiated massively by the Puerto Rican electorate at the polls, that support is likely to continue.

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